

# *Sequoia Review*





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# SEQUOYA REVIEW

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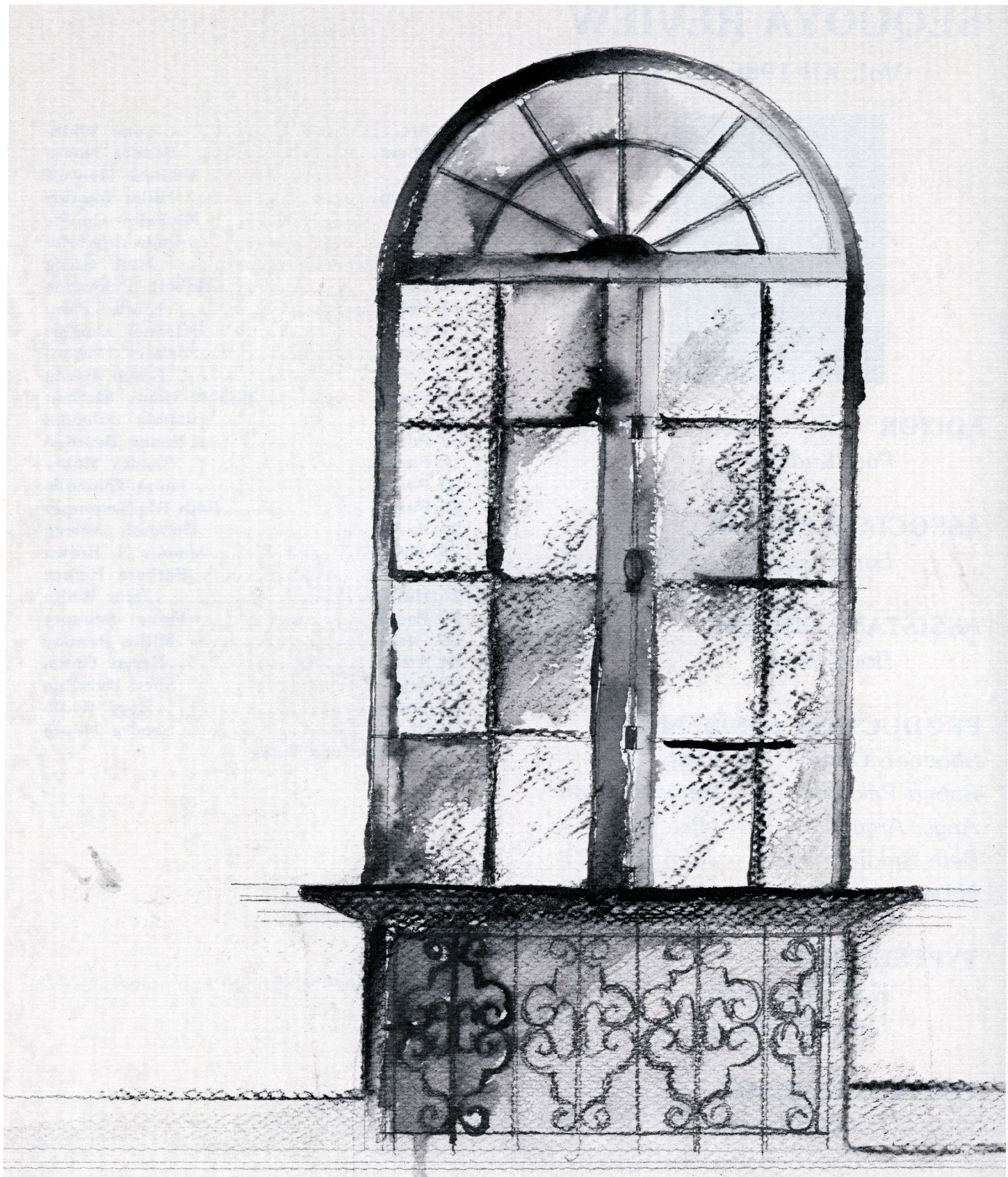
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—Lynn White

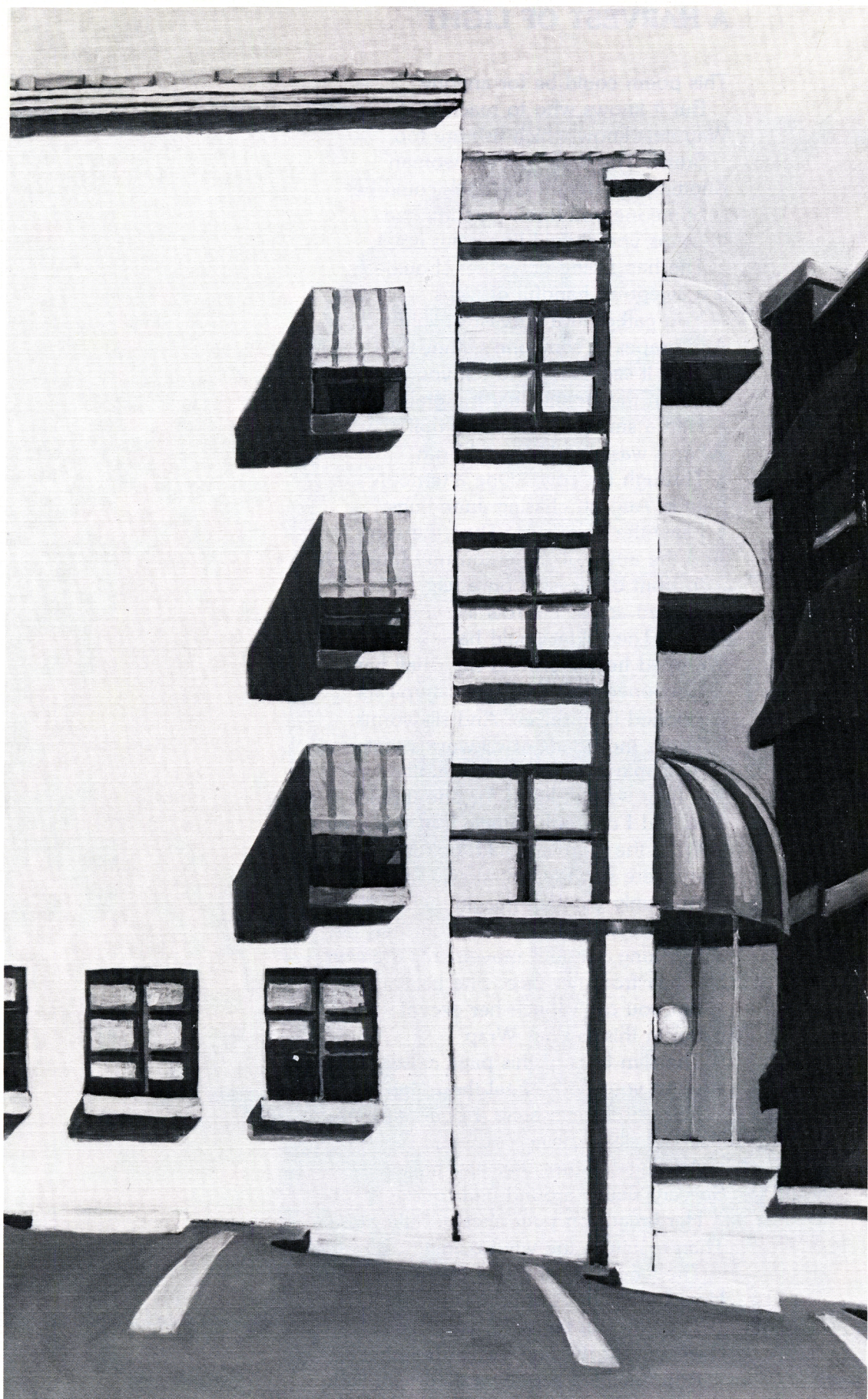


## A HARVEST OF LIGHT

This poem could be for anyone  
But it knows who to reach in the same  
Way nets know which fish are too  
Small. The dark, patient woman  
Knotting the net on the dock could be  
Someone you know or someone  
It seems you should know but don't.  
The hair falling down her shoulder  
Is a swept-up handful of webs  
You gather in a harvest of light  
And grapes in someone's vineyard.  
Now it seems right to tell you,  
Here, in this poem, that my grandmother  
Had a small vineyard and that  
When I was a child I would run  
Through the rows. One afternoon  
Late in August, chasing June bugs,  
I saw the holes first. Then the sun  
And the angle of my vision met four inches  
In front of my face on a web  
Stretched across the row like a giant  
Sail. The spider could have  
Wrapped herself around my small hand,  
Cocooned it as easily as caterpillars  
Cocooned themselves. And silkworms,  
Those thousands of silkworms that  
Would spin themselves into moths  
If they weren't killed for one thread.  
You and I can only imagine, at this moment,  
What the worms would look like if  
They were unwrapped, slowly, alive.  
And only you can imagine what the woman  
Looks like when she shakes out her net,  
Her long, smooth movements drawing  
Her hair from her face. She is beautiful  
But you can't touch her except  
Here, in this to you. Wrap  
The slim lines of this page close  
Around your body. Feel the rough  
Lines of the net against your legs,  
The soft silk drawing you near  
A living creature, her hair trailing  
So very slowly around your neck.  
Her breath on your chest is little more  
Than a shift in the wind coming off  
The waves. That's how the sea breathes,  
How I breathe. And how you breathe, through  
The holes of your life, your hands  
Reaching for the fine hair of her cheek  
And touching a web washed with light.

—Sandra Moore





—Michael Howard

APARTMENT BUILDING

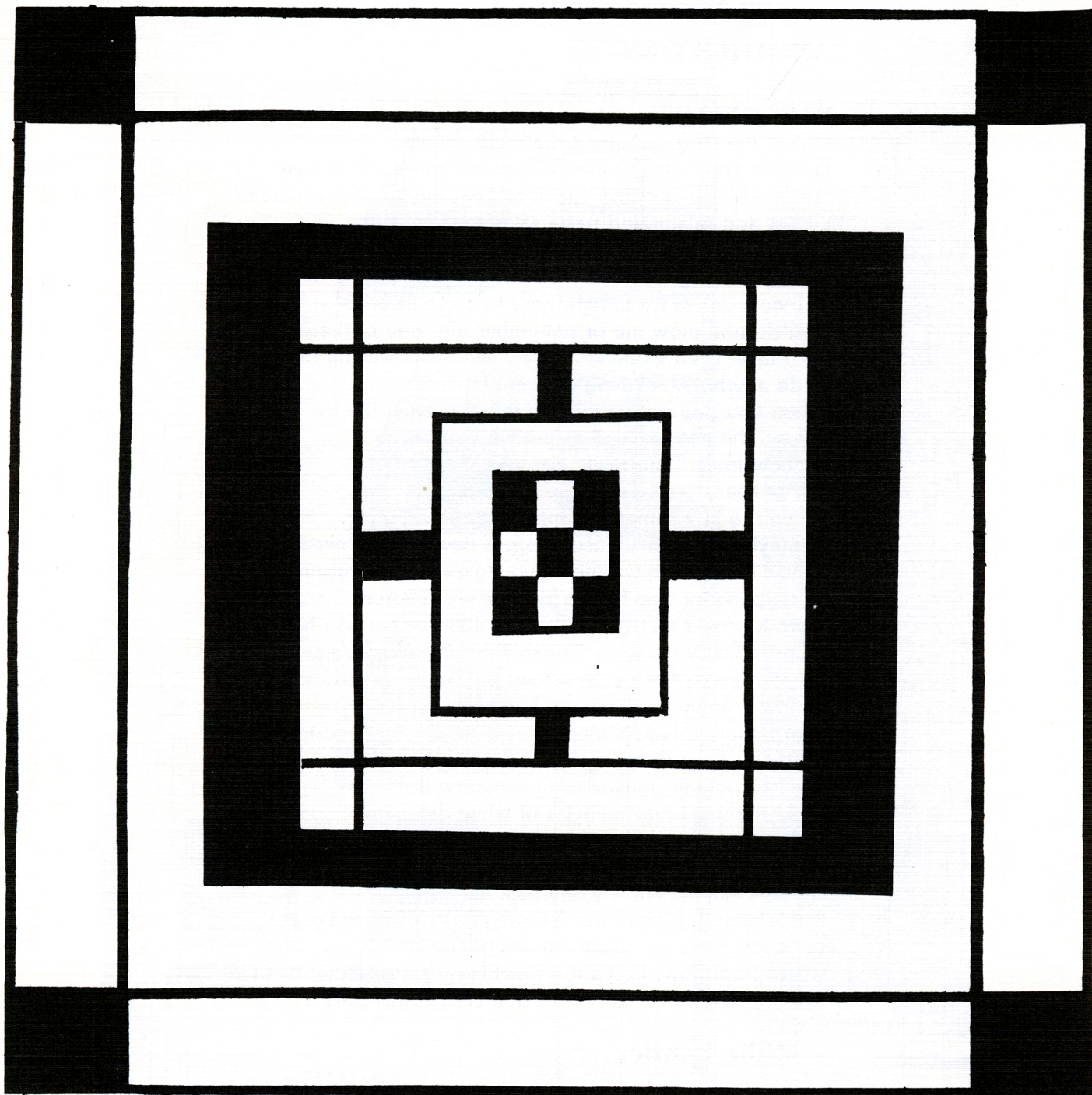


## **ANOTHER DAY**

Nothing. Nothing ever happens  
to me, the woman behind the meat counter  
at Giant Food, the woman who gives you pimento loaf  
for your husband's office lunch and cheese for your childrens'  
boxes, and salami and pasta salad for your party.  
Without me, you would not be able to enjoy the simple  
feeling of being a woman. You would not be able to serve  
to others unless I was right here to serve to you.  
You do not know me or remember me, one of these,  
but I have been working here for ten years waiting on you  
to do anything, anything different or loving.  
When you see me rearranging the parsley in the ice  
around the potato salad or putting out fresher  
rainbow trout, I am really just watching you.  
I have been waiting with my white smock  
for you to buy something special for your family,  
or maybe even for yourself; to put down a little extra cash.  
Really, I have been waiting for you to give me a Christmas card  
or coupons for free french fries for my children  
when it is near Halloween. Today, I know that you have not  
shopped for over a week. Today, I can see over the smelly glass  
counter into your eyes and they say something inward.  
I know it could be anything, knowing you as I do—  
your father broken in a car wreck, or your youngest  
pregnant, your lover or husband needing  
another woman, maybe even someone like me.  
I fold the meat into triangles of white deli paper  
and spread the masking tape over the crease slowly,  
almost lovingly. In a certain way, I am in love with you.  
But it is alright. We will only talk about prices  
and selection, will only touch through wrappings and packages,  
yet seeing you like this today keeps me  
where I am now, keeps me watching you and other women  
like you, keeps me alive and safe behind this glass.

**—Millie Bentley**





— Michelle Cooley

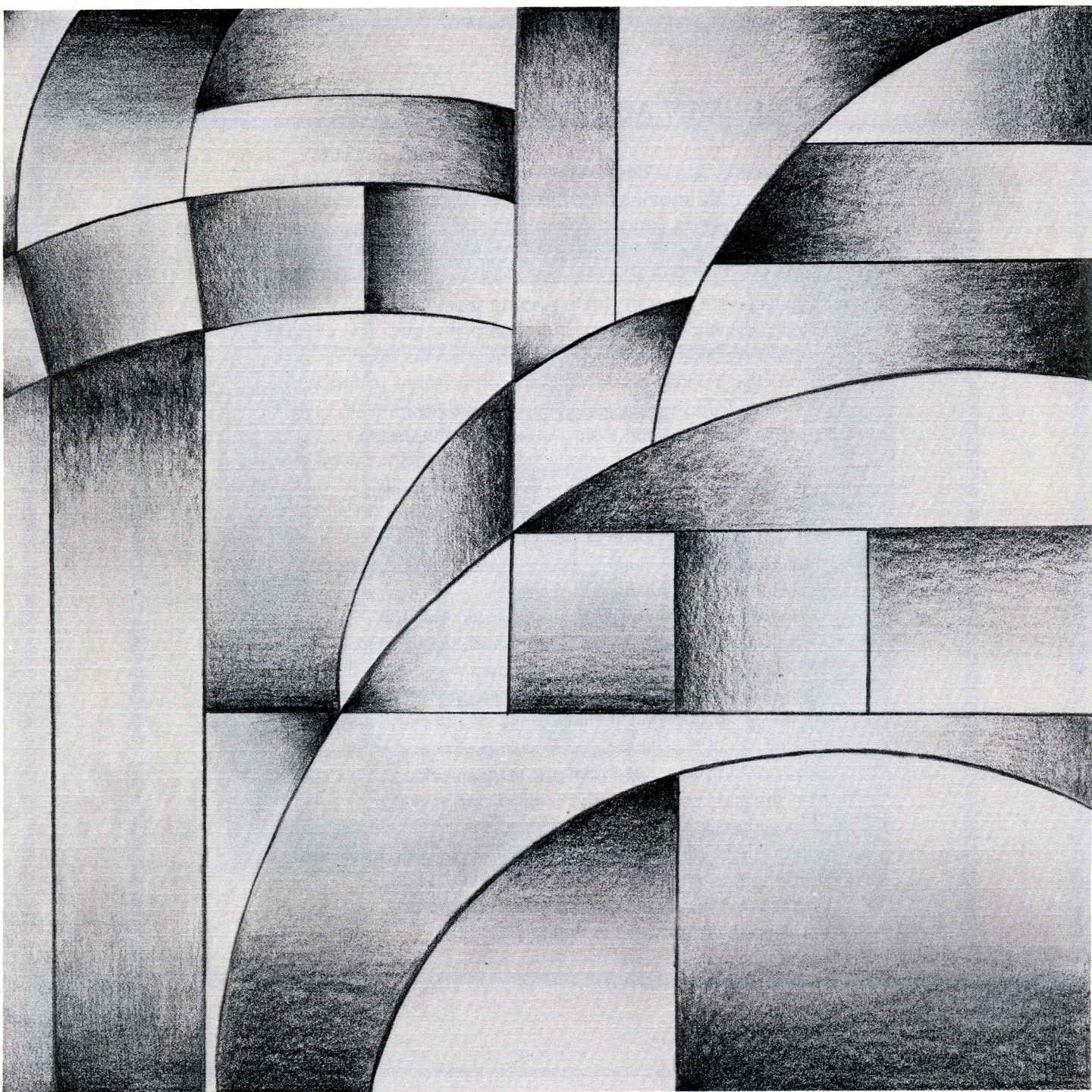


## **IN A DREAM ABOUT YOURSELF**

In a theatre, a girl desperately wishes  
to feel her life moving with her instead of away.  
While she reacts almost violently to this film  
the film of her life plays by evoking no reaction  
as though it is a silent movie and she is blind.  
Later you see the girl driving home from a bar,  
driving quickly she runs two tires into the curb.  
For ten seconds she sits quietly, then begins again  
home, car limping like a veteran come home to find  
he's been forgotten by everyone, including himself.  
Then you see the girl sitting quietly in the shop  
where she works. She calmly takes a ten from the register,  
puts it in her pocket. Nothing furtive about this,  
she can no longer sense it as wrong, wonders if  
that will return, the sense of right and wrong.  
You meet the girl, watch as she makes herself  
dance to music she does not feel.  
Sometimes she makes herself nervous, sweaty,  
perhaps to prove that she sweats and smells, too.  
You know what she is thinking now, wondering if criminals  
commit their crimes to make themselves feel something,  
anything. Wondering if their sense of right and wrong  
is gone, or if that is the point, it remains and only  
by provoking can they prove it to themselves. You speak  
with the girl, passively, she is tired and sweaty  
from so furiously dancing and feeling. You haven't asked  
but she tells what she wants - fuller lips, tighter stomach,  
she wants to sing and dance and never sleep.  
She is leaving, never getting what she wants,  
but it is dawn and she is waking.

**—Angie Argabrite**





– Mark Gregg

EXTENDED PAVILLIONS



## BRAZIL: MODERNIST DISCONTENT

The film *Brazil* is about director Terry Gilliam's modernist discontent—discontent for reasons to become obvious, and modernist because his concerns are concerns of our century, as he himself recognizes by beginning the movie at “8:49 p.m. Somewhere in the 20th century.”

What the film has to say is unpleasant. Mr. Gilliam paints a bleak picture of modernity. He expresses his dissatisfaction chiefly through his portrayal of the governing bureaucracy, specifically, the Ministry of Information and Central Services. The protagonist, Sam Lowry, is a worker in the records department of the Ministry of Information. This Ministry is the most prominent aspect of the bureaucracy that permeates and invades every facet of daily existence in *Brazil*. The name and influence of this organization are both reminiscent of George Orwell's *1984*. Much of the tone of *1984* - an oppressive, omniscient, malicious government - is also found in *Brazil*.

Paperwork becomes an almost inescapable presence. There are many scenes where sheets of paper float in the background, and it is paperwork that causes Harry Tuttle to become a terrorist. Tuttle is a “renegade heating engineer” who has left the employ of Central Services to repair things on his own, because he “couldn't stand the paperwork.” He alone in the movie relates to people as human beings and seeks to help them directly.

An example of the omnipresence of paperwork comes when the Ministry of Information mistakenly seizes a Mr. Tuttle. His frightened wife is given a receipt for her husband (a significantly dehumanizing thing in itself) and made to sign the commanding officer's

“receipt for your receipt.” Gilliam then cleverly uses this receipt as the focus to change scenes to the Ministry of Information itself, underscoring the power of the web of paperwork in this world.

The Ministry of Information is everywhere. It seems no one in the movie can turn around without bumping into it. In fact, at least three times, Sam Lowry does turn around and bump into it, or at least into short men with hats, overcoats, and sunglasses who scurry off.

Maybe the government's pervasiveness would not be so bad, but they cannot seem to do anything right. The abduction of Harry Tuttle was the result of a bureaucratic error: in a very early scene, a government worker swats a fly, whose corpse falls into a typewriter and causes it to misprint a search warrant for Harry Tuttle (the renegade repairman) as a search warrant for Harry Tuttle, the innocent citizen. It is this proverbial “bug in the machine” that leads to Tuttle's arrest and death.

An aspect of the bureaucracy that serves to dehumanize it and thus increase the alienation it inspires is that it is leaderless. There is never any mention of King, President, or Prime Minister or even dictator. There is no O'Brien of *1984* or Mustapha Mond of *Brave New World* to explain the workings of the system to us. The highest official, the defense minister, is a man named - and, in *Brazil*, names are usually significant - Mr. Helpmann. Mr. Helpmann is helpless. He is a cripple confined to a wheelchair, unable even to urinate unaided. That the highest authority is not even in control of his own body suggests that no one is in control of this inhuman bureaucracy.

The only people struggling against this heinous regime are the invisible terrorists. Although there are frequent bombings, when Jill Layton, Sam's girlfriend, asks him, “How many

terrorists have you met, Sam?” we realize that there may be no real terrorists, that this may be a modern version of the concept of continual war that the governments of 1984 used to justify continual repression.

Gilliam criticizes other aspects of modern life besides bureaucracy. Specifically, he takes technology and television to task. The beginning scene of *Brazil* is a store window with eight televisions playing. An unidentified figure walks by with a shopping cart, a bomb explodes, destroying the display window, but, amid the flames, the television continues. The camera then closes in on the television and widens out into the office of the white-coated bureaucrat whose attack on the fly will lead to Mr. Tuttle's demise. Then the scene is changed to a television in the Tuttle family living room just prior to the assault. The message is obvious. Television has become an important link for society, and not necessarily a benign one. Humanity's reliance on television has made it less concerned about people as individuals. The best illustration of this is when a guard who is busy giving Jill Layton the run-around resolutely stares at her image on the television screen—even though she is standing less than three feet away from him. He, and society, find it easier to relate to her impersonally.

Sam Lowry's quite natural reaction to this ugly modern world is flight. Flight or escapism is a dominant theme in this film. The first shot is that of the camera advancing through clouds, and the film ends in the clouds as well. Throughout the picture, clouds and flight are representative of escape and freedom. Even the title, *Brazil*, is from a romantic 1939 song of escape. For Sam Lowry, as for Walter Mitty, dreams are a form of release from the intolerable real world.

There is a sequence of seven dreams interspersed throughout the film. As the movie progresses, they



are affected by the negative experiences Sam has with the modern world, and then they come to dominate Sam's perception of reality. In the first of these dreams, Sam flies majestically through the clouds propelled by metallic, angelic wings. A beautiful woman with long, blond hair and a gauzy floating garment is with him. It is in the second dream sequence that reality first rears its ugly head. Here Sam is flying towards Jill Layton, whom he has yet to meet in the waking world, when huge square towers erupt from the earth, violently separating the two. Sam then awakens to an overheating apartment that will necessitate his embroilment with Central Services. There is much in this particular dream sequence of significance. The method by which we are introduced to Jill Layton is very indirect. We see her first of all in Sam's dream. Our second view of her comes when Sam glimpses her on a television monitor, but shakes his head in disbelief and concludes it was just a hallucination. The third time we see her is in a broken mirror—mirrors are also an important motif in this film, they often blur the line between or somehow combine reality and fantasy. It is as if Sam's dream is slowly becoming reality. Finally Sam is able to catch a fleeting glimpse of her person. It is undeniably his dream girl, but with a curious anomaly: in the real world, Jill has short hair. This discrepancy takes on great significance later on.

Another feature of this dream sequence is the towers that burst from the earth, separating the two lovers. Almost all of the long shots in *Brazil* are from a vertical perspective. There are numerous shots of a solitary person inside a large building from hundreds of feet up. These shots, and the great multitude of vertical angles are not views from the broadly panning human eye's perspective. Rather, these inhuman angles serve to

represent the forces of society beating down on the individual.

After falling asleep on the subway, Sam dreams that Jill is being pulled in a buoyant cage by grotesque dwarfs with hideous masks. He flies between the huge barriers and lands, drawing a sword. At this point he awakens on the subway. Sam then returns to his room, which is in a state of utter chaos after the Central Service's repairmen attempt to fix the heating system. As he turns around, surveying the havoc, he is suddenly transformed into the Dream Sam, turning in his full suit of armor to face a gigantic samurai made of circuitry and tubing. As in his room, he is battling against technology. This is the first time we see what will become increasingly clear. Reality, and the events in Sam's life, directly affect Sam's dreams. It will also become apparent that the reverse is true: Sam's dreams encroach upon reality. He awakens in a coil of tubing. In this scene, Sam also sees the Buttles family in chains; Mrs. Buttles cries to him, as she did in their only real encounter, "What have you done with his body?" Her concern with her deceased husband's remains is a haunting reminder from Gilliam that modern society has reduced people to numbers, files, and images. Her concern is right where it should be, with the flesh.

The next major dream sequence comes in a mall that Jill and Sam are in together after he has finally met her. A bomb explodes in the mall, and Sam and Jill wade through the carnage, trying to help the victims. Soldiers advance, and one grabs Jill by the collar and starts to haul her away. In Sam's eyes he is suddenly transformed into the technological ogre. We see Sam, staring glassy-eyed at the soldier, holding the arm of a shattered mannequin in his right hand. Then, Jill's face appears, and she screams, "Sam, no!" The camera cuts to Sam again, and he is now in

his armor, with long hair, and the doll's arm has become a sword. In his dream, he defeats and slays the monster. Then we see Sam in exactly the same position as before the dream, just before he is knocked unconscious by a soldier. Sam's fantasies have won a great victory, they have vanquished modernity in his dreams, and it will not be long before they will extinguish what we consider reality, too. For the moment, though, the cruel world is able to pull him back.

In the second to last dream sequence, his fantasies actually overpower Sam's perception of the real world. He is finally going to bed with Jill Layton, but when he sees her in bed, she has long hair and the sheets are gauzy and float about. His dream has almost escaped reality and has managed to confuse it. After they have made love, the security forces blaze into the room in their usual fashion, kill Jill, and drag Sam off to an old friend of his, Jack, who, ironically, has been selected to torture him. Jack tells Sam that theirs will be a purely "business relationship." Just before Jack makes his first incision, a shot rings out, and Jack slumps dead to the floor. Tuttle and his band have arrived. They liberate Sam from the torturer's chair, and, in a dramatic firefight, escape the building and then dynamite the Ministry itself. We had vastly underestimated the strength and ability of the terrorists.

But, none of this is real. It is just the beginning of a long and involved dream that culminates with Sam and Jill escaping the modern world entirely, to establish themselves alone in a personal, pastoral idyll in a very green corner of the earth. This dream has a number of false endings, all of which serve to underscore Gilliam's point that no one really knows where reality ends and dreams begin. For Sam, the dream never ends. He has



finally and for good escaped the harsh modern world. After he reaches the Arcadia he will forever reside in, Helpmann's and Jack's faces are superimposed on the verdure, and they speak very revealing words. "He's got away from us, Jack," Helpmann says. And Jack replies, "Afraid you're right, Mr. Helpmann, he's gone." Then, symbolically, the torture chair is shown in the clouds, which represent the unbounded imagination—the imagination that has fled the bleak reality of *Brazil* and created its own world.

Sam has gone, and his flight may seem like an inevitable reaction to an intolerable world, but those of us who wish to remain may choose to ask Mr. Gilliam to propose a different remedy. His purpose is not to provide a solution to the modern dilemma, but he does drop a few meaningful hints. Throughout, Sam constantly implores people to trust him. This is his keynote for human relations, and it comes in direct opposition to all societal directives. These societal pressures to distrust are best exemplified in the profusion of posters, whose slogans advise us that: "Suspicion Breeds Confidence" and "Trust in Haste, Repent in Leisure." At one point, Sam pleads with someone, "Trust me," when clearly visible behind him hangs a poster that asks "Who Can You Trust?" This struggle between Sam's vital concept of trust and the government's efforts to suppress it also finds expression in the mottos of Jill and Tuttle. Jill's keynote is, "Don't touch me." She is furious with Sam because, "You touched me. Nobody touches me." She seeks refuge from the invasive society she lives in, not in dreams, but in a defensive shell—a shell created by distrust. Tuttle, on the other hand, sees a need for unity. His dialogue consists almost entirely of the reminder that, "We're all in it together, kid." And his direct human approach

in trying to help people reflects this, too. In all, we have three reactions to the withering sterility of the modern world. Sam's out-and-out escapism, Jill's defensive retreat, and Tuttle's struggle for sanity. Of the three, the real choice is obvious. We're all in it together, kids.

—Robert Pekkanen

## AMERICAN WIFE OPENS A PACKAGE FROM IRAN

Your mother has sent pistachio again. We snap their salty shells apart and taste the seed of homesickness.

And there is a hard white candy whose name makes me choke when pronounced.

I want to leave that language buried in the back of my throat.

The candy is stale from the long journey, like letters with late news. The printed scalloped lines are not words that I can read. They are more like yarn unraveling from the sweater your mother knitted, the loops connected together with a prayer.

The same thick beige pullover a man might wear, standing by the Caspian Sea, looking far away into the cold dark blue.

The sweater she packed away in your suitcase when you left home to study thick books of technical words and numbers, your third language. But you keep it folded away in a bottom drawer, underneath a limp prayer rug and a box of letters, the envelopes so thin, your government shared all family secrets, the mullas suspiciously listening from stamps.

—Laurie Perry



## OCEAN CITY MARYLAND, JULY 1986

I sell ice-cream and wonder  
why I came back  
after you told me as last August ended  
that the beach scene  
was for old high-schoolers and losers  
and that it was our time to fade.

This one's smile and eyes  
look so much like yours did, Helen,  
that after she pays I must break  
and leave the smells of cold vanilla and cones  
for a bench in the cool salty air.  
She disappears into the bright  
pinks and yellows of her group.  
Together they pretend not to be so afraid of the  
night's flashings and vanishings, huge radios  
drowning out the carnival music,  
violent shadows in bars and arcades.  
Anyone alone desperately looks for someone else  
while the rest drift together  
toward cheap hotel rooms crowded  
with empty beer cans and people  
they will never know.

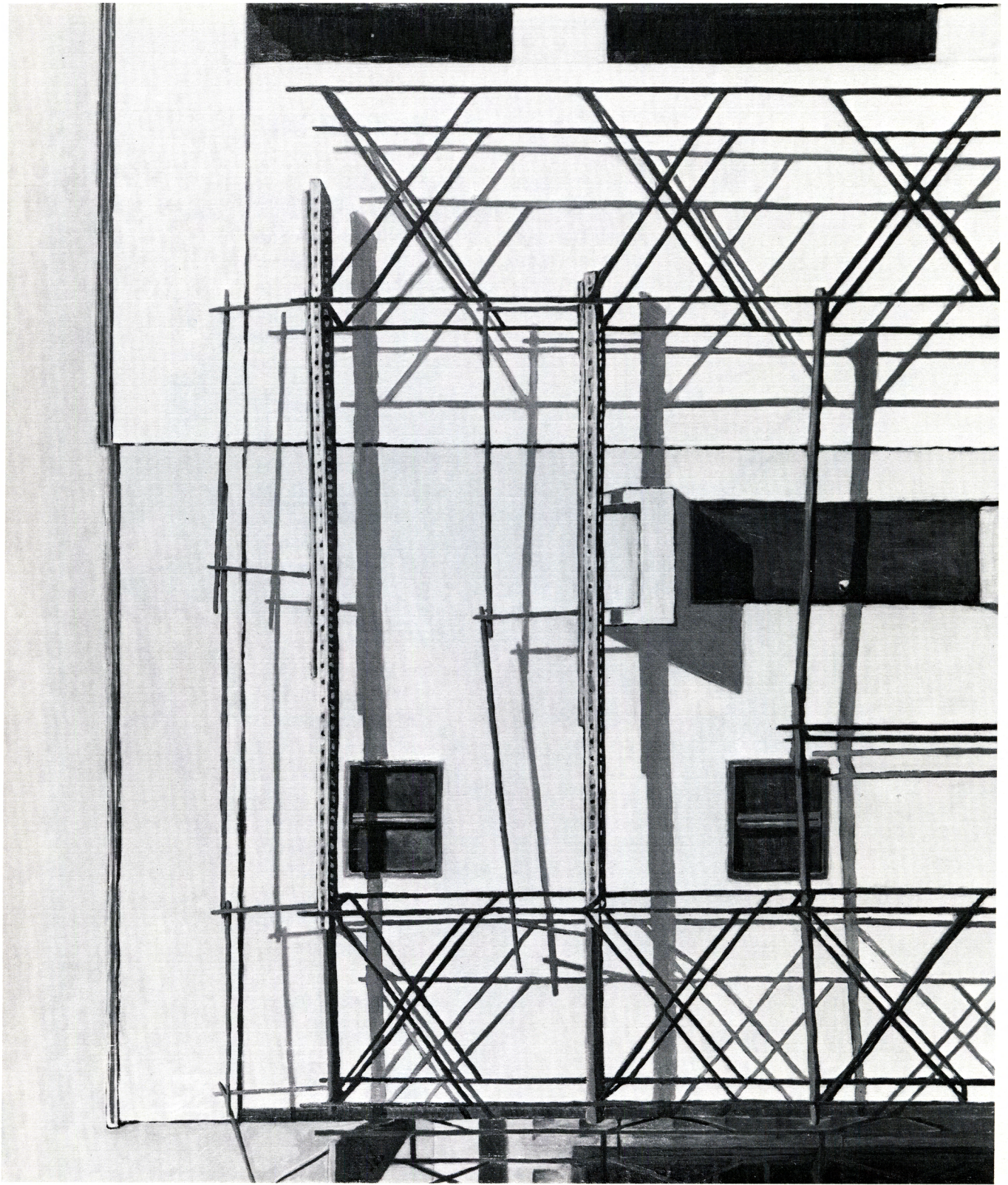
You and I aren't with them anymore.  
I'm with a man and two little girls  
on the bench beside me.  
He looks toward the water,  
or I guess, since it's so late,  
toward the sounds, rushing and pulling away.

When he stands up I realize  
I've been trying not to stare at the daughters he leaves.  
The oldest has climbed to the bench's top rail,  
her white arm gently moves a small comb  
through her sister's white hair.  
These girls don't belong here,  
They seem to me like angels  
too bright to really see.

Their father gives them two swirled cones,  
and I think of the girl I just served  
who had your green, uncertain eyes,  
and I can only sit and watch the gentle albino children  
quietly take their cones.  
This is how I believe the girl with your eyes will take  
the first kisses of the night,  
watching her tanned body succumb as if  
she were outside of it.

—Michael Langley

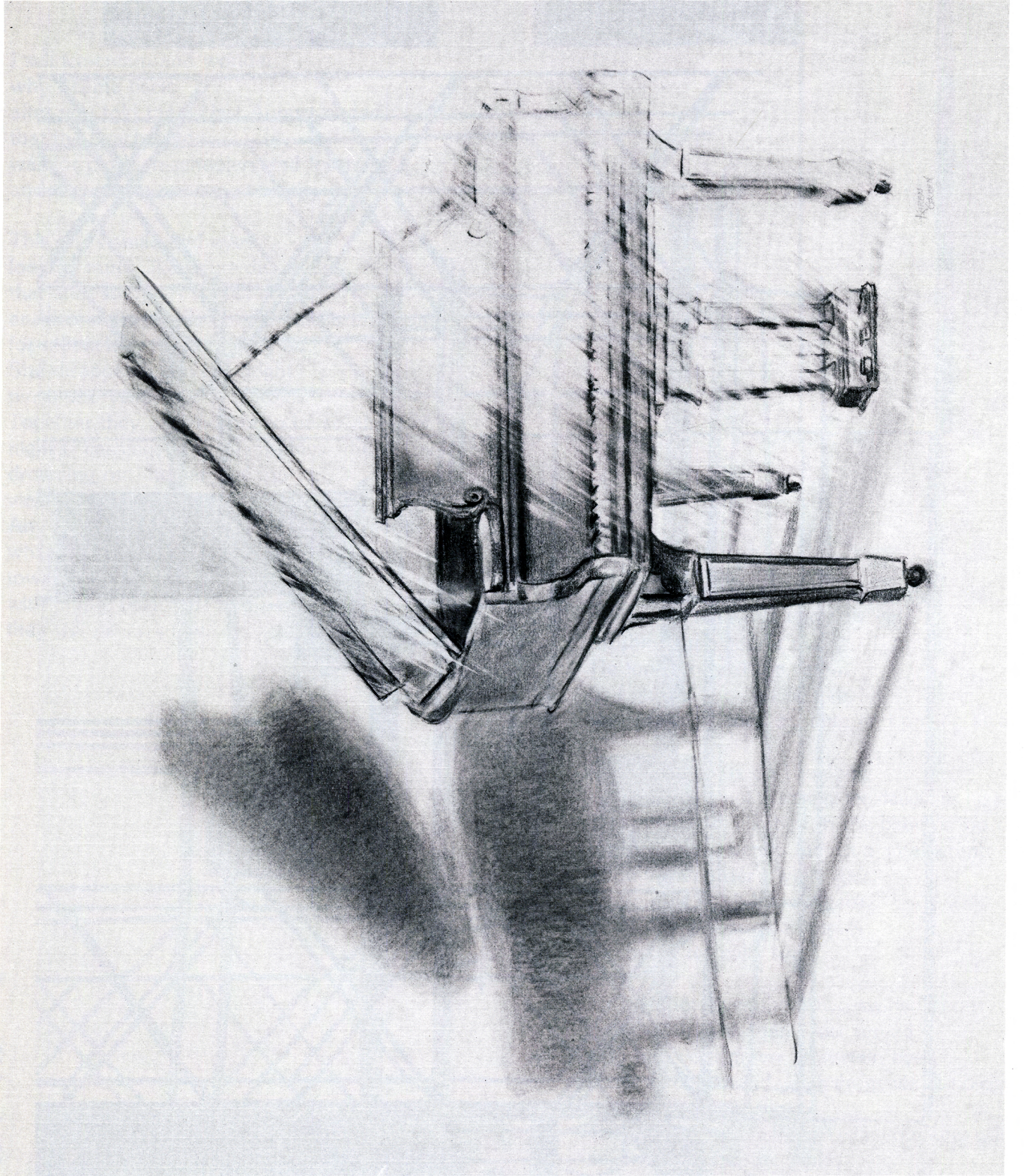




603 BUILDING

— Michael Howard







## **THE BLUE HOUR**

How to say this exactly, to name the low rumble you can feel inside as Betty Carter and her jazz trio walk on stage and begin warming up, the soft wail and drone you hear as she unwraps each note from the black bones in her throat. You've heard it before but never like this, each chord stranger than the one before and now something begins to go wrong, the blue notes hovering in the air too long, undissolved crashing to the ground, pelting the first three rows, notes sticking to their skins. Is this some kind of joke, they say to one another, worried looks on their faces, as people try to leave, but it's too late, the notes already waist deep, piling up in the aisles. Betty is bringing down the house. The ticket office collapses. Now a man on the back row lunges forward, falls on his side, and Betty walks to the back of the hall, leans down and begins kissing his ears over and over, really hard. He sits up violently, full of hope, then follows her back to the stage, and the music they make together, a painful rendition of "Stay As Sweet As You Are," could rival any good jazz group in the country, and the man decides that if he lives through the night, he will sell his business, move to Brazil, eat nothing but health foods for the rest of his life, already composing the kind of note he will leave for his wife, explaining how a man can hear happiness coming into him, and how it sometimes comes, let's say, from out of the blue.

**—Bobbie Henry Steffner**





– Valerie Johnson



## THE PORPOISES

They don't see us,  
Two porpoises flipping carelessly  
In colors of deep water that shift  
Like oil spills in the green.  
They are unaware that  
At another edge of this ocean,  
Touching Crete,  
An olive-skinned Greek fishes for mackerel,  
Fulfilling the legend of King Minos  
And the wealth of his seas,  
Or that even farther  
The Taoist priest paints a landscape  
Of Chinese hills rising from  
The still water.

The stubbled old Greek fisherman told us  
That the porpoises are not fish,  
But mammals like ourselves,  
Gentle protective lovers  
Despite their bulk.  
"They're not dolphins," he reminded,  
And told us of the porpoise's smooth  
Beakless head and small body,  
Covered with hair  
Even before it slips from the womb.  
He shared these secrets with us  
As he glimpses  
The Harbor Porpoise flashing  
Its white belly, arched  
Between the dark water and its  
Own black body.

And though he's never seen these  
Creatures riding the edge of waves,  
The Chinese priest understands  
Their language of balance,  
His brush dotting trees on  
Rice paper mountains.

Tonight our sailboat will submerge  
Us in the water-shadows  
Drawing darkness up over themselves,  
Until we stand facing  
The direction we think the Greek islands lie.

We'll tell one of the old fisherman's stories,  
About the porpoises stranded  
On a sandbar, the whole school choosing to die  
Rather than be separated.  
We'll speak of places we have only seen  
In someone else's paintings  
Or in the words of the old man,  
As the Greek heaves his heavy basket  
Of mackerel from the dark catamaran,  
As the mist  
Gently settles on the hairs of our own arms,  
Startling us, and we suddenly  
Remember words like  
Mammal, tender, lovers,  
The words of the priest gathering  
Colors and brushes,  
The sun rising in China.

—Nancy Bearden



## ACCIDENTS OF TIME AND PLACE

Josh Scudgins pulled his truck into the west field of his father's farm. The field had lain fallow for a season and tall weeds slapped the truck's fender as he drove toward the forest edge a good three hundred yards from the road. His brother Houston sat in the passenger seat, his elbow in the window, hand holding the side mirror. Josh slowed the truck to bump into, then out of, a deep furrow marking the boundaries of the field and swung parallel to the forest line. He stopped by an opening into the woods. They got out and mud sucked at their boots as they walked into the forest. It was the same to them both now as it had been when they were boys, temperature dropping a flannel shirt's worth between the field and the forest, the sudden darkening, the slow growing excitement of close trees and shadows. And even after twenty years the trail was there, freshly mowed, a line of close chopped weeds winding past long-dead trees, around the dried hollow that once was quicksand to young boys, then straight to the rusted gate of the family graveyard.

The wrought iron fence was crusty in places and missing two post heads at the north and west corners but the gate stood firm. A new chain and padlock fastened the dead inside. Josh fished through his jacket pockets, came up with the key, and opened the gate. Weeds grew thick around the headstones. Josh hadn't had a chance to clear them out yet. Houston walked over to a small headstone at the far north end. He knelt and pulled up a handful of weed and grass that hid the carved letters. The inscription read "Arlice Scudgins April 2, 1958 November 14, 1966." Then beneath that—"May his soul fly with angels." Houston outlined the edges of the grave with his finger.

"Come over here and let's mark Daddy's place," Josh said from the other side of the yard.

"I want to pay my respects."

"You paid your respects to Arlice twenty years ago."

Houston turned and looked hard at Josh.

Josh waited, his own gaze level, until Houston turned back to the grave. Josh pulled a hunting knife from his belt. He had already thought of the proper place for Daddy, to the right of the gate going in, like the right hand at the dinner table. He dug a shallow trench around the place and started scraping the grass and weeds away. His mother, had she been alive, would have called it, using her favorite expression, a labor of love. It had been odd, Daddy's last request being that his two sons bury him, though Josh would have done it without the asking. It was right that he and Houston do it themselves. Daddy had buried his own father in this yard even though his mother had pitched a fit because it wasn't church ground. The earth will take back its own, Daddy had said, and it don't much matter to her if she's approved of by any man.

The earth had taken back Arlice before he'd had a chance to labor for anyone's love. Josh remembered the day well, remembered the way the wind had come so suddenly to November, and so cold. The pond had frozen early but instead of skating the first morning of ice they went to the waterfall behind Ridge's Mill, him and Houston and Arlice. They climbed up the hill slick with snow and ice and edged over to the water, lay down and eased close enough to the drop-off to see seventy feet of water frozen like the trunk of a huge crystal tree. Josh saw the creek still running inside the thin ice. Then Houston said he could see a cave behind the waterfall near the top. Josh didn't believe him. Sissy boys always made up stories because they were sissies, and read too many books. Then Arlice wanted to see, too, wanted to climb down to see what was in it, rustlers' treasure and skulls of Indians, maybe. So Josh lay on his stomach

with his legs wrapped around a maple, holding onto Houston's feet, Houston gripping Arlice's arms. Houston let Arlice so far over the edge that it seemed to Josh that Houston's arms were cut off at the elbows. And then the long waiting, the strain wanting to pull his arms out of their sockets but Josh held on, clamping his legs tighter around the slim tree, ignoring the burning of his muscles and thinking he would never again feel this strong. Suddenly the weight eased and Houston scrambled back up, empty-handed, his face red from cold and his eyes white with fear.

Josh finished clearing the place and stabbed the knife into the soil where the headstone would go. Houston was still kneeling, staring at the rough-hewn letters.

"We need to go," Josh said. "Carol said she'd have supper ready for us in a little while and you know how wives get when you mess with their schedules."

Houston stood, mud smeared on the knee of his jeans. "Yeah, I know."

"Still hurts about Mary, huh?"

"It was over three years ago."

"Not like she died, though."

"No."

Josh took his brother's arm and steered him out the gate. "No use locking up, I guess. Nobody's going anywhere."

After supper Josh and Houston went back to finish digging the grave. Dark was still a good two hours off but the crickets and tree frogs had already started up anyway, making it sound like twilight to Houston. That time was his favorite, always had been, when the shadows got long and stretched out in front of him, like when he walked home from the fields in the summer as a boy. Daddy had been a man of physical labor, and though he wanted his sons to be educated, he had never gotten past the eighth grade. Sometimes Houston thought Daddy had wanted Josh to be the bright one. Josh was the oldest, the one who



wanted to take over the farm and make something of it. But Houston was the son with the ideas and he had gone off to the university.

Houston kicked his shovel into the ground and pitched the dirt over near the fence. Josh had stripped down to jeans and boots, and Houston watched the muscles slide beneath his brother's tanned skin as Josh bent to his work. Houston heaved another shovelful. Daddy had been scrawny like himself. Not weak, really, but whip-cord thin. Josh, with his sun streaked hair and broad chest, used to make Houston wonder where his brother got all that. It certainly wasn't Daddy—Houston had found that out a long time ago.

He was fourteen when he caught his mother with the man. Coming home from school early one day with a nose bleed, he passed the field where his father was out on the tractor. Houston waved when he looked up. Daddy cut the tractor off and came to the road.

"What are you doing out of school?"

"Got a bleeder, Daddy," Houston said, and pulled away the handkerchief.

"Been fighting?"

"No, sir."

"You sure?"

"Yes, sir."

Daddy pushed his hat back on his head. "Get on up to the house then and I'll be up directly to see how you're doing."

Houston went slow to the house. He was beginning to get a little dizzy and he entered the house quietly, not slamming the screen door like he usually did. Mama wasn't in the kitchen. Maybe she was upstairs, sick.

His parents bedroom door was closed and he opened it. He didn't know how long he stood there in the doorway before something went black and sinking inside him and he ran to the bed, clutched the man's bare shoulder and tried to pull him away, to keep him from hurting Mama. The man swung out of bed and pinned

Houston's shoulders against the wall, making him hit his head. Blood trickled from Houston's nose, gathered on the curve of his upper lip, and fell the long way to the man's feet. The man raised his hand to slap him. Houston stared at his brilliant blue eyes and was confused—was it Josh who was going to hit him? Then Daddy's voice came from the doorway.

"Take your hands off my boy." Daddy was carrying his 30.06 balanced across his forearm, barrel aimed at the floor.

The man turned his head, hand still raised. Suddenly the gun was in Daddy's strong right arm and he cocked it that way, with one hand, the dark yawn of the barrel levelled at the man's face.

"Now get the hell out of my house."

The man slowly released Houston's shoulders. Houston sagged a little and cupped his hand across his nose.

"Get your clothes and get out. If I catch you anywhere near this place again I'll by God take your head off."

The man gathered his clothes together and stepped into his pants. The barrel of the gun followed without wavering.

"Go to your room, boy," Daddy said.

Houston slipped around behind Daddy as he went. When he got to his room he lay on his bed, letting the blood streak his face, letting the tears ease from the corners of his eyes, plummet the length of his temples and gather in his ears. He heard the screen door bang, then after a while it banged again. He heard the heavy footsteps of his father on the stairway, on the worn hallway floor, the strange misstep when he crossed the rug, the pause before he went in to Mama. He heard them talking low, then the voices went loud and wild, Mama's climbing to a pitch. Houston imagined them, Mama still sitting on the bed, only now in her housecoat, Daddy standing by the window. And when the voices got steady he heard Daddy say, "Well, I guess I know now what

I got for all my work and sweat. I have one son, God knows I'm grateful for him. Then a silence and for the first time in his life, Houston knew his father was crying. "For seventeen years I fed that boy, raised him, taught him what's right, made him mine by love and work because he was my seed, and you just took him from me."

Houston got out of bed and looked at himself in the mirror. He had Daddy's black hair, the grey eyes, the long lanky arms and legs. And he thought of Josh, how suddenly Josh was so blonde, so blue-eyed, so muscular.

But that was nineteen years ago. Tomorrow he and Josh would bury the man they both knew as father. Houston paused digging to lean on the shovel and wipe his eyes with his hand.

"Makes a man sweat, don't it? Not like working behind a desk pushing pencils." Josh grinned. After forty minutes of digging he wasn't even damp. "We'll have her dug in another half an hour or so."

"I guess."

"You can sit down if you want to. I'll finish up."

"I'm all right," Houston said and went on digging.

They finished just before dark. Houston spread out the fake grass they had brought to hide the dirt pile while Josh straightened up the sides of the grave and squared the corners.

"Help me out," Josh said and held up his hand.

Houston grasped his forearm and suddenly that cold November day was as real to him as it had seemed unreal in 1966. He saw in his mind Arlice's thin aquiline face flushed red with cold and excitement, his mittens bright against the snow and dark rocks, the river frozen far below them. And Arlice straining to get closer to the dark place behind the ice, getting a foothold, then a handhold, pulling his hand from Houston's grip, and standing there poised on the rock, then falling back, falling so far.

On the drive back home Houston



wondered when Josh would push him so far that he would tell the truth. The knowledge lay inside him, had lain inside him so long, like a field left fallow a season too many that would sprout forth some monstrous growth once it was planted. It was the last ace up his sleeve, the one thing that would make them even.

Carol met them at the door. She kissed Josh and Houston looked away.

"You men look like you need a beer," she said.

"Thanks, honey. Two for me."

Houston shook his head. Carol went into the kitchen.

"I hope Daddy's funeral is as pretty as Mama's was. You weren't here for Mama's, were you?" Josh asked. Carol brought his two beers and went back into the kitchen.

"No, I wasn't"

"Should have been."

"I know."

"Well," Josh said, "at least you're here for Daddy's. It's only right."

He finished his beers and said he was ready to hit the sack. Houston said good night. After Josh went upstairs, Carol came out into the living room and sat down. They were quiet for a while and then Carol said, "Will you be all right?"

"I'll be fine."

"I heard what Josh said. I'm sorry."

Houston stared at his hands. They were long and pale. "It's only right. He's the firstborn. He's the all-knowing, do what's right no matter what man of the house, now Daddy's gone."

"He does have a little growing up to do, I guess," she said.

"I'd say a lot of it."

"Josh sort of runs you over, doesn't he? He tries to run me over sometimes. It's not easy, living in this house. I wanted to redecorate, you know, make it ours, but he said no."

"He's the man of the house."

"I think he tries too hard. I wanted our bedroom to stay the old guest room. It's airy and sunny and I put up new curtains last month. Josh wants

his Daddy's room, though. He has a good heart, I always try to see his good heart," she said.

"He has his father's shoes to fill."

"It puts a man under a strain to try to be like his father. I hope you can forgive him for that."

"It's alright. He doesn't really know his father."

"They got along. He had a lot of respect for his daddy."

"If he really knew his father, he wouldn't"

"What?"

Houston got up from his chair. "He never really knew Daddy. Not like I did."

"Oh. Another thing he worries me about is Arlice. The other night he had one of those nightmares about Arlice falling. He just can't seem to get over that."

"They were real close."

"I figured."

"Yeah. If you couldn't find Josh, he'd be with Arlice off somewhere getting into trouble."

"But you wouldn't be off with them?"

Houston shook his head. "I was too busy with school work most of the time. Besides which, they wouldn't ask me. I was a sissy boy."

"No, you're just like your daddy, that's all," she said.

He walked over to her chair and squatted down beside it. "But he isn't, you see. He's nothing like Daddy."

"What are you saying?"

"What am I suppose to do, Carol? Tell Josh he's not his father's son? You know he's not as well as I do. I could see it in your face everytime you saw the three of us together."

"It can't be true." Carol shook her head. "You just misunderstood my looks."

"No. I didn't."

She got up and paced to the window and back. Houston leaned his head on the arm of the chair. After a while she said, "You can't tell him."

"Why not?"

"It'd kill him. Please, Houston," she said when he looked at her. "Please don't tell him."

"You don't know how many times I've wanted to. To just destroy him." He clamped his head in his hands. "God forgive me for that."

Carol came to him, put her hand on his shoulder, felt him jump at her touch. "It's all right. It's what everyone would like to do sometimes. He would tell you. I know he would."

Houston heard the sadness in her voice, the hurt that she knew Josh would cause hurting her somehow.

"I won't say anything," he said finally. "It might be right or it might not but I don't think it makes much difference now anyway."

"No. Not much at all."

The service was quick because that was what Daddy had wanted. Afterwards everyone filed past for one last look before they went to the cemetery. Josh stood dry-eyed, his teeth clenched. Houston wiped his eyes with his handkerchief and looked up to see Carol staring hard at him. He gave her a quick smile and she turned back up the aisle.

Only a few went to the grave. The pastor said another word or two, then the pall bearers lowered the shiny grey casket into the hole. They offered to help shovel but Josh shook his head. It was his job to cover his daddy, his and his brother's. They didn't want any help. Only Carol stayed. She sat on the folded up fake grass.

Josh threw a couple shovelfuls of dirt on top of the casket. The dirt thumped hollowly and some of it ran off the sides. Houston picked up his shovel and tossed some dirt down.

"What are you going to do now that Daddy's gone?" Houston said.

"What do you mean? With the farm?"

"Yeah."

"I was kinda hoping you'd come back and us could make a go of it together."

"You know I can't do that, Josh. I got my own job in the city."



"Yeah, I know, but we could do good on this place."

Houston shook his head. "I like what I do. I don't want to be a farmer."

Josh stopped throwing dirt and leaned on his shovel. "Daddy told me once not to expect too much of you when it came to working the farm. And I didn't. And you never surprised me."

"There's more to life than this farm."

"Nobody ever expected anything out of you, why should I expect your help now?"

"Josh," Carol said.

"You know," Josh said, "Arlice and I had big plans for this farm. We were going to clear out some of the forest and start coffee, see what we could do with it. We used to sit up by the mill where you could see almost all the farm and make plans." Josh smiled a little, for the boy he remembered himself as, and for the boy Arlice.

"I'm sure they were good plans," Houston said.

"Now I'll probably have to sell the damned place to break even this year and then Lord knows what I'll do."

"Go to the city and get a job."

Josh threw his shovel down and it slid from the dirt pile into the hole, the blade hitting the casket with a thud. "All I've ever been able to do was work on a farm. How the hell am I suppose to get a decent job in the city. I know seeds and seasons and tractors. All Carol will ever be is a damned waitress and we can't live off what she'd make."

"I could help you."

"I don't want your help now. You could have helped before. I'm not sure I can trust you now. Arlice shouldn't have."

Houston paused, his eyes levelled on Josh's face. "It was an accident."

"You dropped him over a fucking cliff."

"Why can't you let him go?"

"Like you did?"

"It wasn't my fault. Don't you understand? He was climbing around.

I didn't have a hand on him when he fell. He's been gone twenty years, Josh. Let him rest. Let me help you."

"It's too late." Josh rubbed his face with his hand. "It's too late."

"For what, Josh? For you to start over? Or for you to finally forget what happened before?"

Josh sat down on the dirt pile and held his head in his arms.

"What do you want from me?" Houston said. "You have to forget him. I lived with the nightmares until I got a new nightmare to take its place. You have to let me help." He bent down and put his arms across Josh's shoulders.

Josh laid his head on Houston's thin chest.

"It's all right," Houston said.

"No, it's not all right. It's not okay." Josh raised his head up at the sky shattered by tree limbs and leaves.

Houston saw the long muscles of his brother's neck tighten against his skin. "Go on home," he said. "I'll finish here. Carol, take him home."

"No," Josh said, and stood up. "I'll stay and help."

"I'm not trying to take your place with Daddy," Houston said. "I could never take your place with Daddy."

They finished filling the grave and headed on to the truck. It was late, and the sun was snagged for a while in the treetops. Carol sat in the middle on the way home. She had the Big Worry look on her face and Josh patted her knee.

"What's the matter, honey?"

Carol glanced at Houston.

"Nothing," she said. "It's nothing."

Josh put his arm around her and looked out the window at the rows of corn he would be harvesting in another month or so.

Houston leaned his head out the window, the passing air stinging his eyes and pulling the hair from his neck. He held his hand out, feeling the wind drag it back and the sun laid his hand, long and thin, across the asphalt. It had always been his favorite

time of day, the time he felt closest to his father. He would never really leave this farm, or this earth. He stretched his arm out so that the shadow only went from shoulder to elbow. None of them would ever leave. He stuck his arm out straight, his shadow fingers slipping through weeds by the road as he opened and closed his hand, trying to catch onto ragweed or honeysuckle blossom.

**— Sandra Moore**



## **ELBERT COUNTY, GEORGIA**

On the opposite bank of Beaver Dam Creek  
abandoned homes succumb to the earth  
almost mingling with cracked acorns  
and half-buried Mason jars,  
remnants of former lives,  
growing, harvesting, saving for winter.

One home, perhaps my grandfather's,  
now droops and bleeds  
into a fallen-in well.

Clustered wisteria sags,  
brushed lightly against  
a chipped, porcelain sink  
propped against a decaying oak stump  
lost in the shadow  
of the crumbling front porch.

There, in the evenings,  
someone used to sit  
in a great rocking chair,  
with a child in his lap,  
and listen to the brown thrasher  
singing in an oak across the creek.

**—Laura Gunnells**



## A FEW LAST-MINUTE REVISIONS

Don't go yet. The boats can wait,  
and until now I've been as silent  
as my dreams of deep water and dark,  
empty stages. I'm wondering  
if you can remember something,  
tell me if this could be right:  
Marsine wore a straight-brimmed  
hat then, and always, didn't he?  
It was black, and he was only twice  
as tall as I. I thought he was  
a leprechaun with a French accent  
to his German. He would stare  
into the orchestra pit waiting for lights  
and for a pianist, my father, both urged on  
by his emotional gesturing.

And how does this sound: that my father  
sat in the house seats, third row,  
middle section, bending the brim of a hat,  
that he kept his trenchcoat on as he  
made his way to the piano, and when he left,  
disappeared under the stage  
after finding his hat, put high  
on a stack of chairs by a janitor, that  
in a corridor underneath the stage,  
he leant his head on his hand  
while holding a receiver.

I don't want to talk about dying.  
I wish I had a picture  
of a man in a gray overcoat  
reaching his hat, the right  
side of the coat hanging off-center  
and brushing the chairback.  
Then I would tell you how it is  
that he goes to sleep singing  
completely for himself, no telling  
what he's saying, amused and singing  
the way he might stand with one foot  
in a mud puddle which runs  
unexpectedly to his shin.

II  
Or maybe the story goes better  
this way: Her first memory, she will say  
is of her father singing. She knew  
"San Antonio Rose" and "Your Cheatin'  
Heart" at four years old, as well  
as his cologne at breakfast and how

the pink sun looked, pouring angled  
through the chair slats when he left.  
He is taller than the sun when he  
stands up. His old navy uniform is  
twice too thin for his wife. In a picture,  
his wife's arm disappears past the shoulder  
behind his back. It is uncertain whether  
she holds his back with her arm, if  
that is a fist curling his shirt at his waist,  
or a shadow, her arm dangling at his leg  
or behind her own back. Both people  
are dark, their faces shadowed by the sun  
overhead. Their blond child does not,  
cannot? look at the camera.

It is not easy to tell what goes  
through the man's mind as he holds  
his daughter's shoulder. He has told her  
not to look at him. Knowing that,  
it is certain that he did not forget  
fields in Mississippi that he worked  
as a child, too ashamed or too proud  
to wash earth from his face, but  
scared to go home. Every morning  
the man bends forward to put  
the key in the ignition, sees  
between the mirror and the dashboard  
steam rising from frost on the empty garden.  
It is much like nothing he has ever known  
before he moved north.

### III

It has occurred to me, you have  
the face of the *curandero*  
and the palms of his cupped hands  
that caged the live *chicharas*  
as he spoke to the mute.  
It was as if, with his throaty syllables,  
he was reminding the mute of how  
to speak, teaching her to talk  
while he filled the woman's mouth  
with cicadas, their wings' vibrations  
giving sound to her whispers: *I don't believe*  
*what I am about to say*. Or should  
it have been *I don't believe*  
*that I'm telling this to you*  
*of all people, you don't know*  
*what it means, all these words*  
*I've wanted to say for so*  
*long, you don't need to know*.



But, of course, that was not the point.  
The shaman's gift of speech to the woman  
she repaid by simply talking.  
He might have asked her to tell  
him a story, much like a doctor would  
ask the patient to cough, to sneeze,  
or in this case to yell, to boast,  
to cry, to argue over the price  
of carp, or to sing a little.

#### IV

Far away from his children, an old man sits  
on darkened steps of a house. On this windy  
crag of Georgia stands his house, and he stands  
in the doorway facing the bay. He complains  
of paper mills as he watches the sea, says to me  
*it's going to rain if you can smell it.*

Far away from his beach there are warships  
and shrimpers, but the day is all greenish  
and gray, and only he knows the boats  
pass by. *The shrimpers are going home,*  
*warships for open sea.* He leaves his door,  
picks up a flashlight and some rope  
and we walk down the thirty-two steps  
to the sand. Halfway to the pier  
it grows dark; the flashlight picks up  
the wooden columns, almost completely  
submerged to the planks in short-capped  
waves. He walks out to the end of the pier,  
still smiling at my stories and my drafts.  
Dangling his feet in the water, he sits  
tying square knots to secure his boat.  
He stays after the knots are finished,  
as if talking to someone in the ocean,  
then, getting up, lets go of the rope.  
One of his shoes has dropped and is carried  
by the swell of a wave. And I know him  
well enough. He will walk home  
carrying the other shoe.

—Beth Riddlesburger

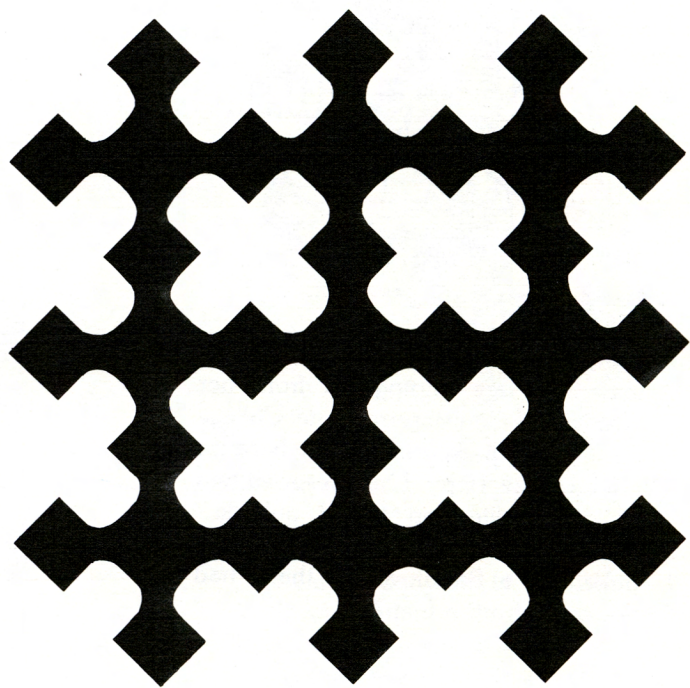
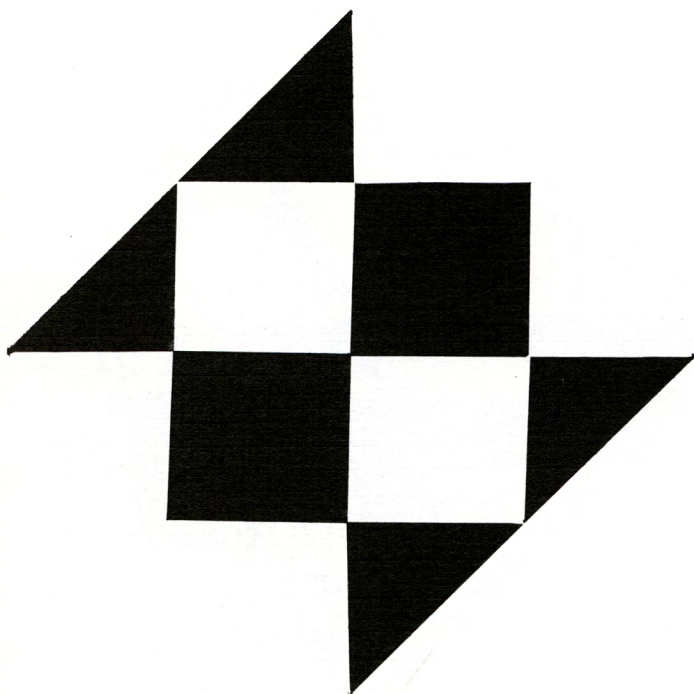
#### SONNET

Awake again at 4 a.m. I give  
Her what she's crying for: my breast.  
She sucks to sleep and leaves me with the rest  
Of lonely night to listen, to relive  
My angry scenes, to write long letters in my mind  
To people who would never write me back.  
I watch the splintered shadows, try to track  
The headlights as they spill through slatted blinds.

Yet I am glad to have her in my bed.  
Her breathing keeps me safe. Her skin  
Is softer than her worn, washed cotton gown.  
I hold myself to stop the lights. The sounds  
Of cars and trucks begin to fade.  
I let sleep come before she wakes again.

—Deborah Nerren





—Barbara Hofses

—James N. Brown (clockwise from upper left)



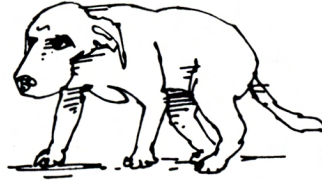
## BIT BY A BLIND MAN

1.



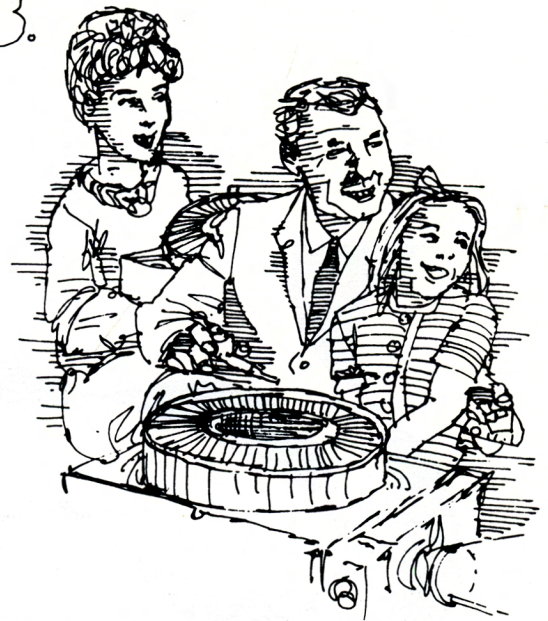
When I was but a baby

2.



there was Tippy.

3.



My mom and dad and my sister Ruth loved Tippy. They would take photographs of Tippy and make movie slides from the photographs and show pictures of Tippy on the living room wall on a bed sheet. My mom and dad and sister were very National Geographic in those days, and they were real Beavers, and real Life of Rileyers, and my sister, especially, was a real Friend of Flicka.

4.



My sister, Ruth, seen here in an extremely rare photograph from her years at the Gennesserrat Hotel College for Women disliked me greatly because I did not like Tippy. I had despised him all of my life and I had publicly threatened to kill him once when he puked on a Bartok album that I had borrowed from a friend.

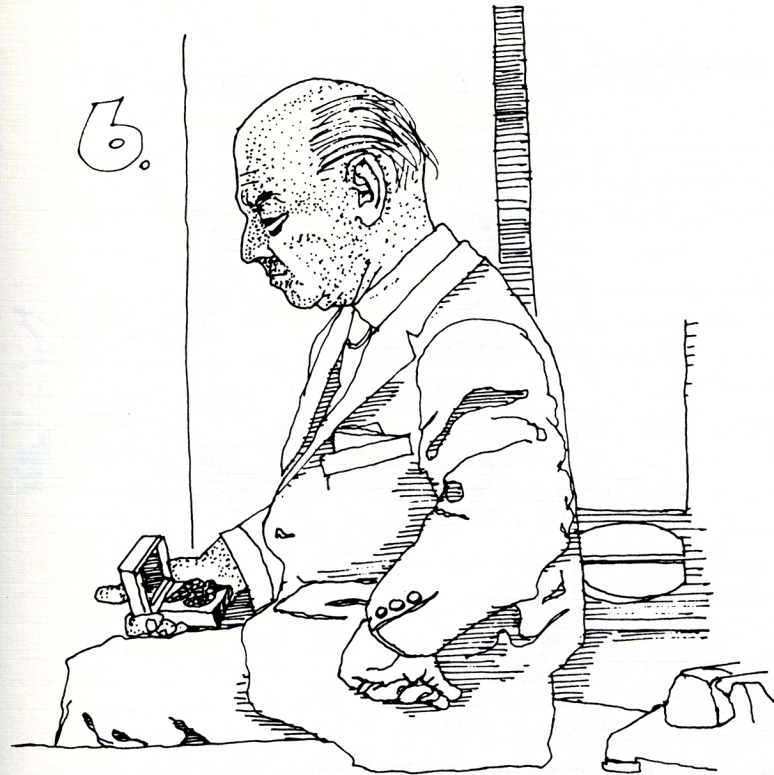
5.



One day, when my mom and sister were away in D.C. seeing a senator friend about the alarming death rate of darters and the fouling of the air in 4-B subdivision



6.



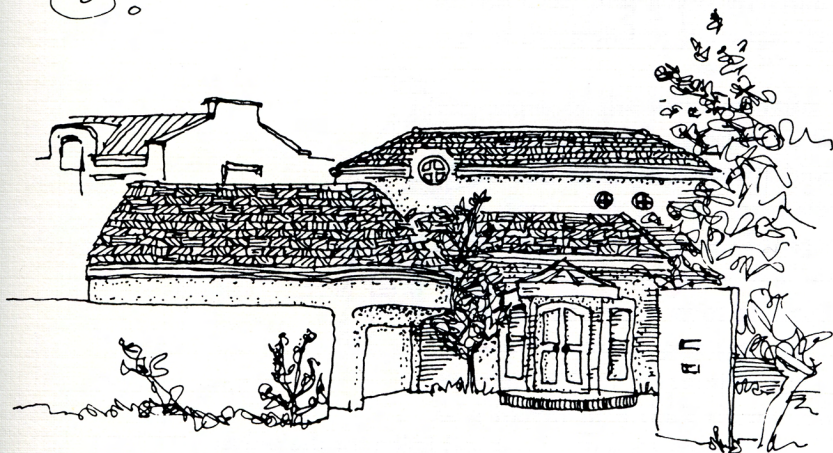
and my dad was in his high-rise office in the De Beers Building, staring autisticly at a piece of diamond jewelry he had purchased for a harlot,

7.

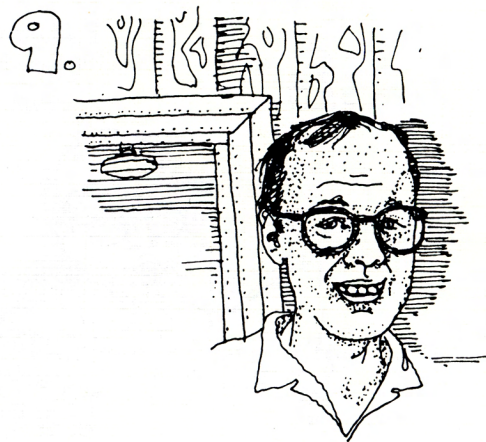


I was alone in my room at the house playing pool and Tippy was in the study listening to some Dietrich Fiecher-Dieskau on the stereo. Suddenly it occurred to me that the needle had been stuck on the last note of 'Ging heut Morgen uber's Feld' for over an hour.

8.



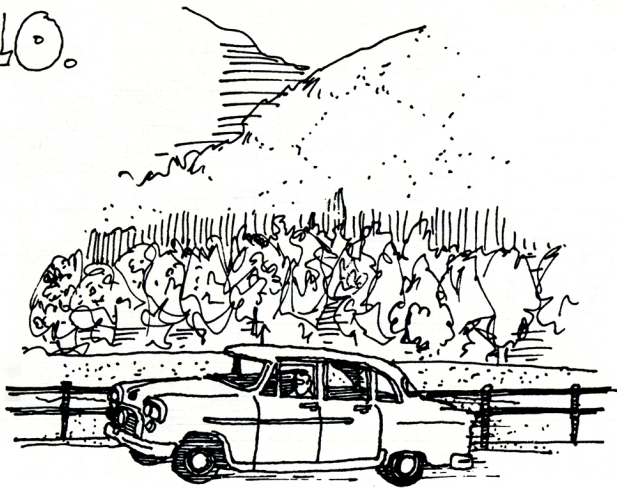
I went to the living room and discovered that Tippy had obviously suffered a massive stroke and was lying dead—on one of my favorite sweaters.



I didn't know what to do. I knew that mom and dad and Ruth knew I disliked Tippy so. They would never believe that Tippy died naturally while we were together in the house alone. Especially after I had threatened him.



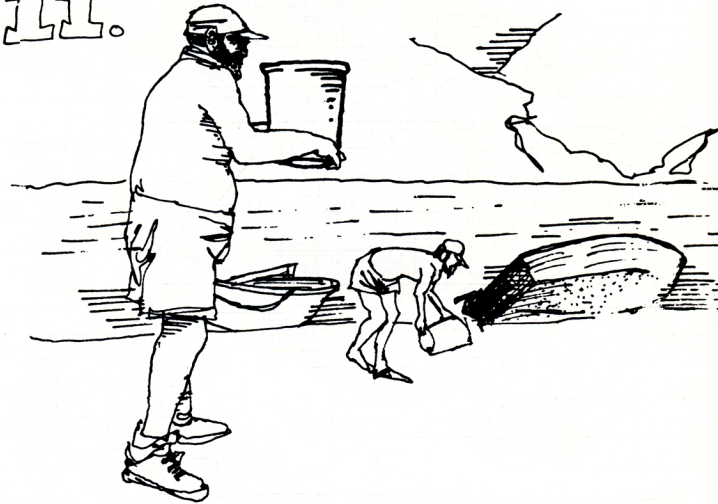
10.



There was only one thing to do. I got some sleeping tablets from the bathroom medicine cabinet and placed them beside Tippy to give the appearance of suicide. Then I got in my car and I didn't quit driving until I reached the Mexican border at Sonoita.

Three Years Later...

11.



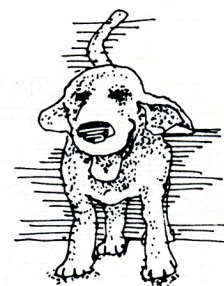
at Huatabampo, where I was working as a crabber under a fictitious name,

12.



I read in a Mexican newspaper that Tippy had been chosen to pose for a square on the Purina Dog Chow bag.—Tippy was alive!

13.



I had fallen for the oldest dog trick in the book. Tippy was just playing dead.

—John White



## UNDER THE WILLOW TREE

I remember the blood on your hands  
that spread in half moons across the grain of your skin.  
And the circles of pressed fur like smudged thumbprints  
that you left on the stray dog we found beaten  
behind our trash cans. The dog's life slipped  
through your fingers like its blood.  
Just like the bag boy Joey did through mine.  
One day he was placing the grocery bags  
with his own peculiar precision in just the right place  
on our jeep's floor. The next day he was found standing  
in a barley field west of town, murmuring  
how to move through it was like a dream.  
When the sun hits the slanted grass of midafternoon,  
I see its green light through half-closed eyes  
and move under the willow tree against its slender branches,  
cool with hidden breezes. I remember what Joey said,  
and I realize I know what he meant. I wonder  
what it would be like if you'd walk with me  
late in the day, if you'd care that I could almost  
feel his breath when he whispered those words.

His mother sits by the front window  
of their yellow house. Its paint peels  
in little flakes like skin. I brought her  
some ripe tomatoes and we watched the afternoon  
light slowly hide itself. You don't understand  
why I went to see his mother, and why after going  
we didn't speak of him at all. But I knew  
that for her he was still there. And when I touched  
the walls of their house, I thought I touched Joey  
or the stray dog I had watched glint his life away  
out of the holes of his wide eyes.

The sighs of the wind at night  
stir my hair gently. I listen to them  
while you talk, your words blown over the porch.  
You don't look at me and I stare at your eyes  
and watch them move. Tonight, when your lips  
touched mine and your face was cool and white,  
I tried to see your eyes shining in the moonlight.  
I looked to see if you saw me, or if you were  
wandering in your mind's eye, an eye dim  
as a mirror in a dark room, reflecting what you see  
only when there's light, like an ocean breeze  
stirring the surface of the water and changing forever  
what you saw in its depths. And tonight,  
when you told me you were leaving  
I smiled because your face was still and calm  
reflecting the ripples your words didn't leave behind.

—Franci Schoner



## WITHOUT LOOKING BACK

At Marta's pastry shop in between the rail tracks  
and the South district, I do not go to see the old

men who come for day-olds after Sunday mass  
or the kids with school-boy pennies

for cheap sweets. Behind the counter today  
in white smock and ponytail is the new girl

who has no thumbs. I watch when she reaches  
into the wet glass case for an a la mode and catches

her knuckle in the corner—like a child  
getting his finger caught in the sharpener of a crayola box.

And I feel just like she feels when she pulls it out,  
slipping it in behind her tongue, feeling it swell

like a tiny puffer fish. I watch to see  
how she holds the pointed cone I ask for,

and later a wineglass at my apartment after her shift  
—both like a pair of sharp scissors that might

at any moment slide from her grasp to harm.  
When we make love, it is as if any minute she may come to harm.

Baby stumps—she holds them behind her other fingers,  
pink like the tips of two unripe pairs, and I love them

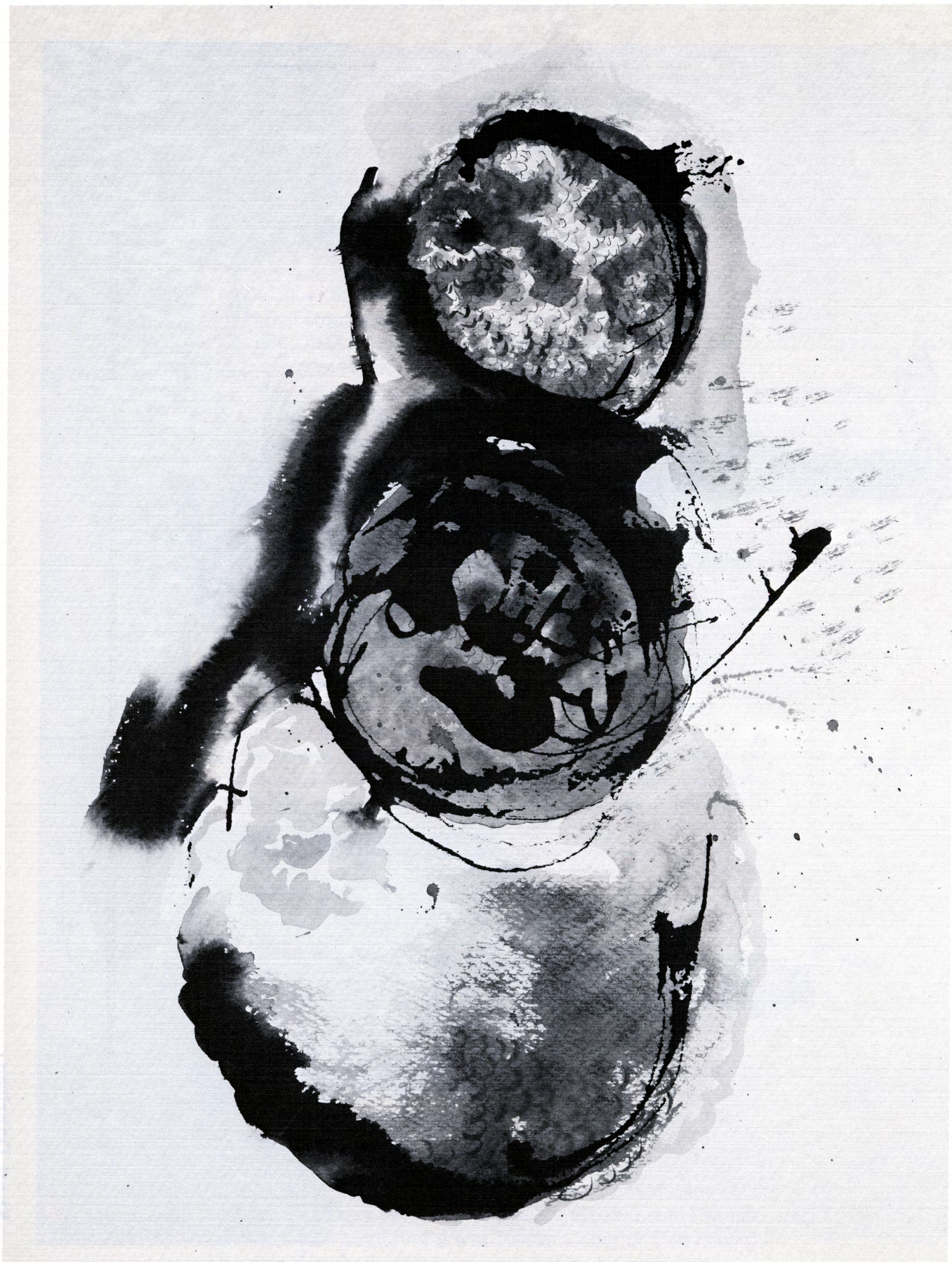
more than myself, more than my own body  
that carries me to work and home and kids each day.

I walk her to her car in the shining late rain,  
I kiss her last just on the forehead,

and for the last time because I know that I will never  
be able to hold her down with my own perfect, painless skin.

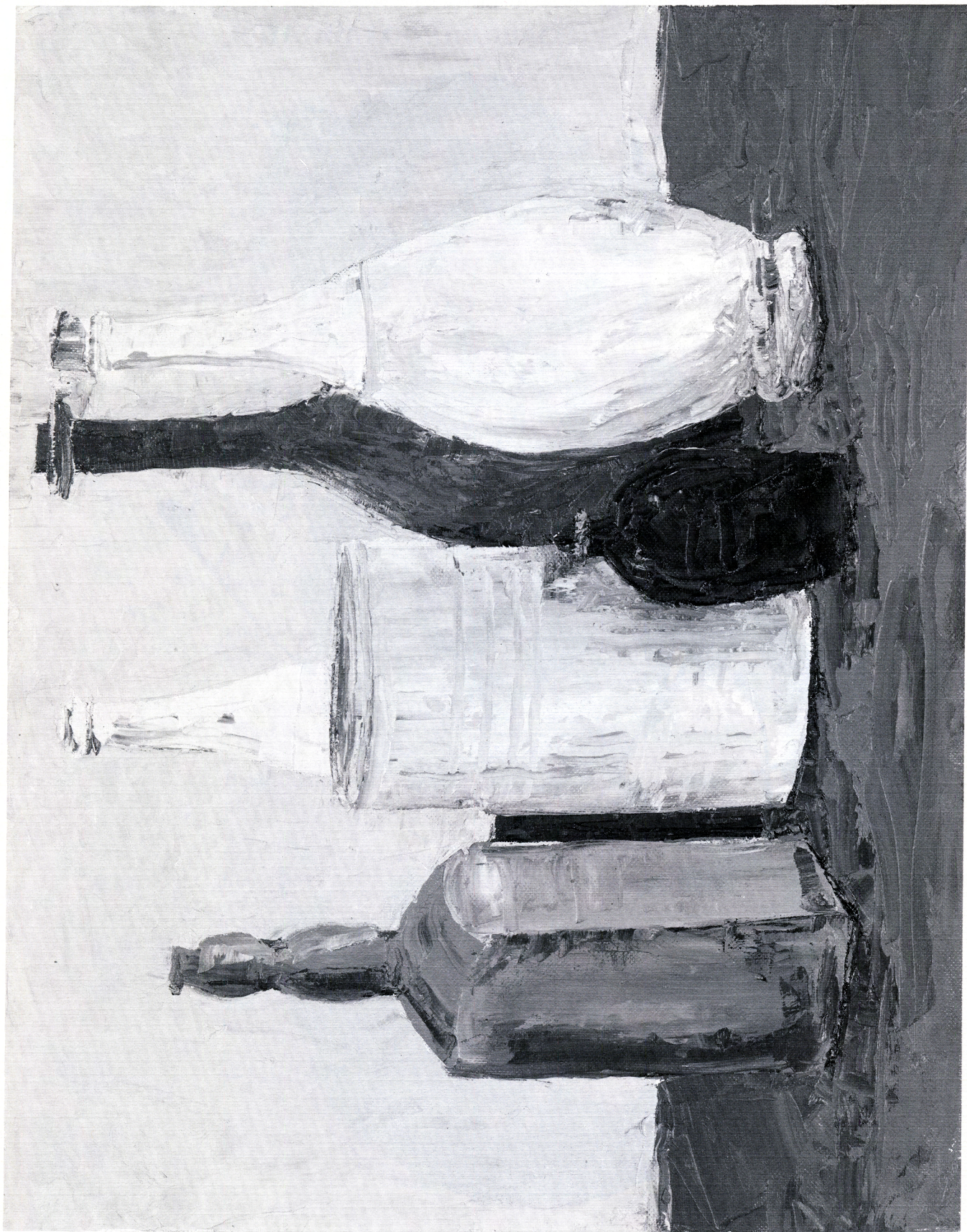
**— Millie Bentley**





—Karen Green





– Sheri Dahrting



## A PHOTOGRAPH OF COLOGNE, 1945

I'll never know, Grandfather, if the soldier walking away  
From the bombed church in Cologne is you or someone else.  
His back is turned to the camera, his coat pulled  
Up tightly about his neck, and he is leaning slightly  
Forward as if he is about to break into a run.  
He takes no notice of the old woman to his right  
Who is looking through the ruins of the church, and the road  
He is following seems to want to carry him out of this  
Photograph and into some scene I can't even begin

To describe. In front of the soldier, further up the road,  
I can make out a cart full of hay drawn by two oxen,  
The reins held by an old man with a hat pulled down low  
Over his eyes. I am suspicious of the man and want  
To believe that there are Nazi fugitives hiding  
In his cart, and that the soldier, if he is you, has seen  
Them, and is reaching for his gun. Or perhaps I'd rather  
Believe that the old woman has told the soldier, told you,  
That the cart's driver has a pretty daughter who likes  
Young Americans, or that he has been hiding a pilot  
Who was shot down in February whose description fits  
The one of your brother who's been missing for three months.

Let's say the soldier is not you. Let's say he's someone  
Else you told me about, maybe Nelson Cutter, the 21 year  
Old steelworker from Pennsylvania who in another of your  
Photographs is standing in front of a barn somewhere  
In Southern France, his arm around a farmer's daughter  
Whom you are sure he never told his wife about.  
Or the soldier is not even American but German, and as he saw  
You approach, he turned wanting to disappear into the rubble  
Of the church, to fling his body into the hay in the back  
Of the wagon, and someone took the picture with your camera before  
Three rifle slugs slammed into him, his body collapsing

Into a pile on the road. Then again, I think now the picture  
May not be of a soldier at all, but of the woman whom I  
Think must be well past her fifties, so bent over is her  
Back, so tired and wrinkled is what little I can see of her  
Face as she searches through the church's ruins. For an ivory  
Crucifix, for a charred family Bible, for something to eat,  
For one of her grandchildren who may not have survived  
The shelling like the young boy you are holding in another  
Picture taken near the Rhine, a boy whom you told me  
Two minutes later blew a hole in Dan Griffith as the soldier

Bent down to pick him up. In that picture of you and the child,  
I can see your face but not what you are thinking, and I wonder  
Who took the picture—if it was Nelson Cutter or Dan himself,  
Unaware that the last few moments before his own death  
Were being taken down on paper.



I don't know, and I think I could still be getting it all  
Wrong, and it's not the soldier or the woman you wanted  
To remember, but the ox-cart and the ruins of the church  
Themselves. Perhaps you weren't even in Colonge when  
The picture was taken, and somebody, maybe a girl whose name  
You never knew, gave it to you as a reminder.

The soldier,  
The ox-cart driver, and the old woman are not anybody  
Special, and there is no daughter who likes young Americans,  
No child buried under the rubble, no brother  
Who's been missing since February who could have been  
The person who took the picture, the photo being the only thing  
You finally had left of him like the one Dan Griffith  
May have taken of you and the child.

You told me how in one town you found once an entire  
Family dead, crammed into a wine cellar, their wrists slit  
The mother's arms wrapped tightly about her children, and I  
Remember how you said in Germany at night it would get  
So damn cold that soldiers would stuff leaves and dirt,  
The clothes off the dead, into their sleeping bags  
To keep warm, that later Nelson Cutter got drunk and went  
Down in the streets, fumbling for his rifle when the shelling  
Started.

Looking through your photos there is none of this,  
And I wonder why you made pictures of so many strangers,  
People you probably didn't know,

People I don't: the French boy leading a cow across  
A muddy road in this one, in that one a man playing the guitar,  
His back against a stucco wall, and in another—the one  
Stamped "for personal use only, not for publication"—  
The German prisoners who are smoking cigarettes by the aid station,  
Some smiling for you when they couldn't speak the language.

I want to believe it was the only way you could  
Convince yourself you were still alive, that the war hadn't changed  
You, and so I keep looking at these photographs not for what they  
Can tell me, but for what they can't. I keep looking for something  
I've missed, for that indescribable angle or that particular  
Turning of light you could never get down because what the  
Woman was looking for in the destroyed church, what was really  
In the ox-driver's cart, or where the soldier is walking  
Is not to be found among the ruins of the town, is not in  
Any photograph or in the dates scribbled hastily in pencil  
On the back, and could never in any way be turned into paper.

**—Boyd White**



## VISIONS BEFORE WAKING

Let's say your life has already been lived.  
Maybe you came home from work, late  
last night, and your wife recognized  
you as someone else. It could be that someone  
has been to your birth, perhaps was dressed  
by your mother until he was three, rode

your red and blue Kmart special bicycle, rode  
in your father's van that had lived  
through day care, the fourth grade dress  
rehearsals, and then the Halloween someone  
rolled it two blocks down, making you late  
for your girlfriend's party. You recognize

your own face in the bathroom mirror, recognize  
the unmatched blue and grey eyes that saw the road  
home, the eyes you inherited from your late  
uncle, who gave you Oriental rugs. Someone  
has walked in your shoes, literally, and lives  
in your skin. He remembers the green dress

your daughter wore on Easter Sunday, he dressed  
her doll so she wouldn't cry. He, too, recognizes  
the wrongness of this, the halfness, hates living  
in your body, hates living in your mind like someone  
who has no right to be there, a wanderer of roads  
passing houses and people you know, making you  
late

to awaken or to sleep. That is why sometimes late  
at night, in a car, unshaven and half-dressed,  
you travel alone along certain dead, dark roads,  
watching for opossums and dogs. You are someone  
else in a life only partly yours. The recognition  
of this is cold. Here, now, you are living

what has been. The idea of a stranger living  
in your body, in your mind, is hateful. It is late  
at night and in the depths of sleep you recognize  
the silence of a burglar, see a shadow of someone  
just inside. You slip quickly from the bed, dress,  
find the gun. In your mind there is a road

and you recognize far down the road the figure  
of someone you remember only late or early  
in sleep, dressed in your clothes and alive.

— Sandra Moore



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*Back cover photograph by Fielding Freed*



